

COLORADO CANYONS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA
Rabbit Valley Working Group Meeting Minutes
September 9, 2002

Attendees:

Bob Silbernagel	Mike Click	Mel Lloyd
Gene Arnesen	Jim Cooper	John Potter
Sue Benjamin	Dave Dunsmoor	Jane Ross
Nadja Brozina	Dawn Folks	Lovell Sasser
Arleta Carr	Neal McKinstry	Charlie Sweet
Kathy Click		Paul Toft

Greetings and Introductions

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) handed out copies of the August 6, 2002, meeting minutes, along with an updated map reflecting proposed alternatives for Rabbit Valley.

Working Group Discussions

John Potter had previously accepted group leader responsibilities and opened the meeting. Land health and grazing issues will be discussed at the next meeting. John pointed out that an additional trail near the pond needs to be identified and plotted on the map. The main focus of tonight's discussion is to reach a consensus on non-motorized versus motorized travel on Wild Horse Mesa.

Bob Silbernagel updated the group on a recent Advisory Council discussion concerning the Rabbit Valley area. Bob reported that minimal support exists for motorized travel on Wild Horse Mesa, there are paleontological concerns surrounding the proposed target-shooting area, and a trail north of I-70 should be single- versus double-track.

John asked Jim Cooper, BLM Transportation Planner, for guidance on how to determine whether a riparian zone exists, and when it is acceptable to ride in a wash. Jim responded that a general rule-of-thumb is that riding in a wash is acceptable when the vegetation in the bottom of the wash is consistent with that at the top of the wash. Jim added that an expert would need to verify a specific wash to be sure.

John proposed that the group present other items for discussion, and Bob asked whether the group was ready to recommend the updated version of the map. Dawn Folks indicated that horseback riders are not prepared to approve the existing map because no concrete information on trail usage and impact is known. Dawn added that the National Conservation Area's (NCA) purpose is to enhance the existing environment, not add further damage. John addressed this statement by saying that some trails are being closed, which reflects the group's sensitivity to current user impact. Gene Arnesen, BLM Outdoor Recreation Planner, stated that the plan allows

for mitigation of damaged and closed trails. Paul Toft reminded the group that the Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area (CCNCA) is a multiple-use area, and where humans are allowed access to trails, there will be damage—mitigation must be planned for.

Dawn felt that some trails were not addressed on the map, and Jane Ross, CCNCA Planning and Environmental Coordinator, informed the group that Jim had worked closely with BLM's resource protection staff in developing the current version of the map. Jim was advised by the BLM resource staff to remove some existing trails from the map. Jim added that a trail plan involves multiple aspects that must also be considered, such as signage, mapping, and ultimately, maintenance of those trails. Jane reminded everyone that when a trail is closed, as a result of resource damage, it is closed to all users. Dawn added that damaged trails are destroying an ecosystem, and Jim offered that the trail system design should focus on encouraging users to stay on existing trails.

Charlie Sweet proposed a solution that entails a coordinated effort by all NCA user groups to develop volunteer agreements utilizing grant money. Charlie indicated that past attempts to initiate these agreements with government agencies have not been successful. Jane added that the BLM needs a volunteer coordinator, as well as volunteers from the surrounding communities to provide follow-up and monitoring for the resource management plan (RMP). Paul reiterated that it is important for BLM to tap into available volunteer resources, and John confirmed that monitoring and maintenance of the trail systems would be required by the user groups.

John asked whether there was a recommendation for the map, and Nadja Brozina stated that proposed trails for Wild Horse Mesa be omitted from the map. Dawn supported this by saying that all other trails had been too damaged for enjoyable use by horseback riders and that Wild Horse Mesa should be left alone. Jane offered that, while the proposed trail exists on the map, it is highly unlikely that the trail would ever be approved given significant issues involving both private lands and a cultural area.

Dave Dunsmoor expressed concerns with not only horseback riders being designated use of the larger percentage of the NCA for the smaller percentage of users, but also with the proposed trail on Wild Horse Mesa being intentionally set within a cultural area to ensure its demise. Jim addressed Dave's concern with trail routing and assured the group that proposed trail configurations shown on the map are not exact and are placed with the best possible trail routing in mind.

John asked the group whether the proposed Wild Horse Mesa trail system should include mechanized travel, and if there was no strong opinion, then leave the trail on the map to be considered as an alternative. Dawn voiced concerns with this option, and Jane reminded the group that the RMP process includes developing alternatives for management; those being the no-action alternative, a recreation-intensive alternative, a conservation-intensive alternative, or executing adaptive management. Jane requested that the group leave the proposed trail system in, and the required Environmental

Impact Statement will determine its viability. Jane advised folks to wait to make a decision on this issue until reading the draft plan. Gene added that the draft RMP would propose a preferred alternative, with other alternatives listed thereafter.

Arleta Carr asked about the undesignated portion of the foot trail near the paleontological area south of I-70, and the group agreed that, if the terrain allowed, a fully designated loop trail should be created rather than leave it as a dead-end trail.

Both Dave and Mike Click questioned why the Gibson road was gated, preventing access to an overlook, as well as the river. Jane explained that historical litigation involving private land and dangerous rock formations prohibited BLM from considering opening the road. Paul proposed that access to the river be created but end the road some distance from the river. A hiking trail could then provide access on down to the river.

Both Bob and Jim agreed that the proposed trail system near the paleontological area south of I-70 offered great multiple-user opportunities.

The group agreed to delete from the map the proposed trail providing river access given that both private land and railroad easements would be required. The group also agreed to convert the undesignated trail running along, and south of I-70, to hikers and horseback riders only.

John asked whether everyone approved of the closed trails as marked on the map. The group had no problem with the closed trails as shown, if there were no access issues to an old well north of I-70 that Lovell Sasser knew about. Jim reminded the group that BLM must provide access to both private land and transmission towers located within the CCNCA.

Dawn asked the group whether the designated shooting area north of I-70 was necessary, and Bob indicated that the Advisory Council had requested that BLM provide an area for that specific purpose. Jane added that BLM lands historically allow guns and it would be difficult to block that user group from the area. Dave, representing the shooting community, mentioned that, while no area south of I-70 is appropriate, no area north of I-70 is ideal for a shooting area. The specified location on the map is the best site available. This shooting area did not necessarily need to be designated or marked, but shooting did need to be allowed. The group agreed to designate the entire area south of I-70, as well as "The Trail Through Time" north of I-70, as "no shooting" zones.

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, September 23, at the Fruita Civic Center. The first half-hour will be dedicated to discussing an existing trail system south of I-70 that is surrounded by private lands. The remainder of the meeting will focus on land health and grazing issues, and Jane will arrange for a facilitator to attend for those discussions. John adjourned the meeting at 7:55 p.m.